

Delicatessen

Kilmer, Joyce, 1886-1918

Why is that wanton gossip Fame
So dumb about this man's affairs?
Why do we titter at his name
Who come to buy his curious wares?

Here is a shop of wonderment.
From every land has come a prize;
Rich spices from the Orient,
And fruit that knew Italian skies,

And figs that ripened by the sea
In Smyrna, nuts from hot Brazil,
Strange pungent meats from Germany,
And currants from a Grecian hill.

He is the lord of goodly things
That make the poor man's table gay,
Yet of his worth no minstrel sings
And on his tomb there is no bay.

Perhaps he lives and dies unpraised,
This trafficker in humble sweets,
Because his little shops are raised
By thousands in the city streets.

Yet stars in greater numbers shine,
And violets in millions grow,
And they in many a golden line
Are sung, as every child must know.

Perhaps Fame thinks his worried eyes,
His wrinkled, shrewd, pathetic face,
His shop, and all he sells and buys
Are desperately commonplace.

Well, it is true he has no sword
To dangle at his booted knees.
He leans across a slab of board,
And draws his knife and slices cheese.

He never heard of chivalry,

He longs for no heroic times;
He thinks of pickles, olives, tea,
And dollars, nickles, cents and dimes.

His world has narrow walls, it seems;
By counters is his soul confined;
His wares are all his hopes and dreams,
They are the fabric of his mind.

Yet - in a room above the store
There is a woman - and a child
Pattered just now across the floor;
The shopman looked at him and smiled.

For, once he thrilled with high romance
And tuned to love his eager voice.
Like any cavalier of France
He wooed the maiden of his choice.

And now deep in his weary heart
Are sacred flames that whitely burn.
He has of Heaven's grace a part
Who loves, who is beloved in turn.

And when the long day's work is done,
(How slow the leaden minutes ran!)
Home, with his wife and little son,
He is no huckster, but a man!

And there are those who grasp his hand,
Who drink with him and wish him well.
O in no drear and lonely land
Shall he who honors friendship dwell.

And in his little shop, who knows
What bitter games of war are played?
Why, daily on each corner grows
A foe to rob him of his trade.

He fights, and for his fireside's sake;
He fights for clothing and for bread:
The lances of his foemen make
A steely halo round his head.

He decks his window artfully,
He haggles over paltry sums.

In this strange field his war must be
And by such blows his triumph comes.

What if no trumpet sounds to call
His armed legions to his side?
What if, to no ancestral hall
He comes in all a victor's pride?

The scene shall never fit the deed.
Grotesquely wonders come to pass.
The fool shall mount an Arab steed
And Jesus ride upon an ass.

This man has home and child and wife
And battle set for every day.
This man has God and love and life;
These stand, all else shall pass away.

O Carpenter of Nazareth,
Whose mother was a village maid,
Shall we, Thy children, blow our breath
In scorn on any humble trade?

Have pity on our foolishness
And give us eyes, that we may see
Beneath the shopman's clumsy dress
The splendor of humanity!